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ABSTRACT

The National External Degree Program (EDP) of the American Council on Education is an alternative way for adults to earn a high school diploma. EDP is a competency-based, high school level assessment system that credentials mature adults who have acquired their high school level skills through their life experience. It uses materials adults have seen and used in their roles as citizens and workers. EDP differs from the General Educational Development (GED) Tests, because EDP does not look like a traditional test but consists of projects and oral interviews in which adults demonstrate 65 competencies in a series of private, weekly appointments. No courses are required; counseling and referrals are part of the EDP system. EDP has been added to provide an alternative for a population not normally served by the GED program. The first national survey of EDP graduates has been conducted. It illustrates how EDP complements GED, as it serves a different population with regard to student goals, age, and time spent out of school. According to the findings, nearly one in four indicated some disability; 66 percent were employed for pay before entering the program, as compared to 50 percent among GED test-takers; two-thirds indicated personal satisfaction as the most important reason for taking the EDP, whereas 32 percent of GED test-takers cited employment; and less than 2 years after completing the EDP, 40 percent had enrolled in another educational program. (YLB)

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National External Diploma Program

Report from the Other

High School Diploma Program

Results of the First National EDP Survey

Presentation at AAACE Conference

November 1992

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National External Diploma Program

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT

THE EXTERNAL DIPLOMA PROGRAM (EDP)

In 1990, the Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials at the American Council on Education (ACE) added a new option for adult high school completion called the National External Diploma Program (EDP).

What is the National External Diploma Program (EDP)?

The National External Diploma Program is an alternative way for adults to earn a high school diploma. EDP is a competency-based, high school level, assessment system that credentials mature adults who have acquired their high school level skills through their life experience. It complements the GED Tests because it allows adults to choose the mode of testing best suited for their particular learning style. It removes one more barrier in which the test itself, not the skill of the tester, might be the barrier to the demonstration of competence. EDP has proved to attract a different population than that served currently by the Tests of General Educational Development (GED.)

How are the EDP competencies demonstrated?

The academic foundation skills, such as oral and written communication, computation, problem solving, reading, and critical thinking are embedded in an applied-performance assessment project that looks like a real life task. The EDP uses those materials adults have seen and used in their roles as citizens and workers. For example, an adult might demonstrate reading, writing, and critical thinking by searching for a new apartment. In that project, the adult demonstrates specific skills by reading the lease, writing a letter of complaint to his or her landlord, solving a typical adult problem, and budgeting the rent from a simulated monthly salary. Each EDP graduate also documents, through verification from employment, training, or by performance, a particular vocational, academic, or special skill they possess.

How does the EDP differ from the GED?

GED tests are 7 1/2 hours long, are administered primarily in groups, and are based on the high school curriculum.

The EDP does not look like a traditional test but rather consists of projects and oral interviews in which adults demonstrate 65 different competencies in a series of private, weekly appointments (called "spot check/interviews.") Some parts of the assessment are also done at home (called "tasks.") Within the assessment process, the EDP demands a 100% mastery of all competencies, but allows for the adult to self-pace the learning, to re-do those items missed, and to demonstrate her or his skills in private. The time necessary for completion of EDP, then, varies with each individual's skill level, but normally averages 6 months.

What courses must be taken to earn the diploma?

There are no required courses. Many adults have learned the required skills at work and at home since they left school. Those who do not have all the skills will be told which ones are missing and how they can be developed with the help of existing adult educations programs, tutors, family, friends, libraries and other community resources. Counseling and referrals are part of the EDP system.

Report from the "Other High School Diploma Program"

Results of The External Diploma Program (EDP) 's first national graduate survey are in!!

The first national survey of EDP graduates was conducted this summer under the auspices of the American Council on Education (ACE). Graduates from the seven states participating in the study--California, Connecticut, Maryland, New York, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin--completed the program in 1991.

The survey illustrates how EDP complements the Tests of General Educational Development (GED), as it serves a different population with regard to students' goals, their age, and the time they've spent out of school. The total report and analysis of this EDP survey will be published at a later date; key findings, however, are summarized below.

- The average age for EDP graduates is 37. Only 16 percent of EDP graduates were in the 18-24 age range, compared to 53 percent of GED candidates. Among more mature adults, fifty percent of all EDP grads were 35 or older whereas only 16% of GED graduates fall in this age group. Ten percent of EDP graduates were 55 and older, in contrast to GED's 1 percent in this age group.

- Nearly one in four EDP graduates responding to the survey indicated some disability. Of these, 24 percent indicated an orthopedic problem, 11 percent an emotional problem or specific learning disability; 6 percent a visual disability not correctable by glasses, 8 percent a hearing disability, 3 percent a speech disability, and 26 percent some other health impairment. In the 1989 GED candidate survey only 7 percent of GED test-takers reported a disability

- Sixty-six percent of EDP graduates were employed for pay before entering the program, as compared to 50% employed for pay among GED test-takers..

- Two-thirds of EDP graduates indicated "personal satisfaction" as the most important reason for their taking the EDP. Next in importance was "admission to college" (15 percent) and "employment" (13 percent). This contrasts sharply with the GED, where 32 percent of GED test takers cited employment and 33 percent admission to college as their main reason for seeking the diploma.

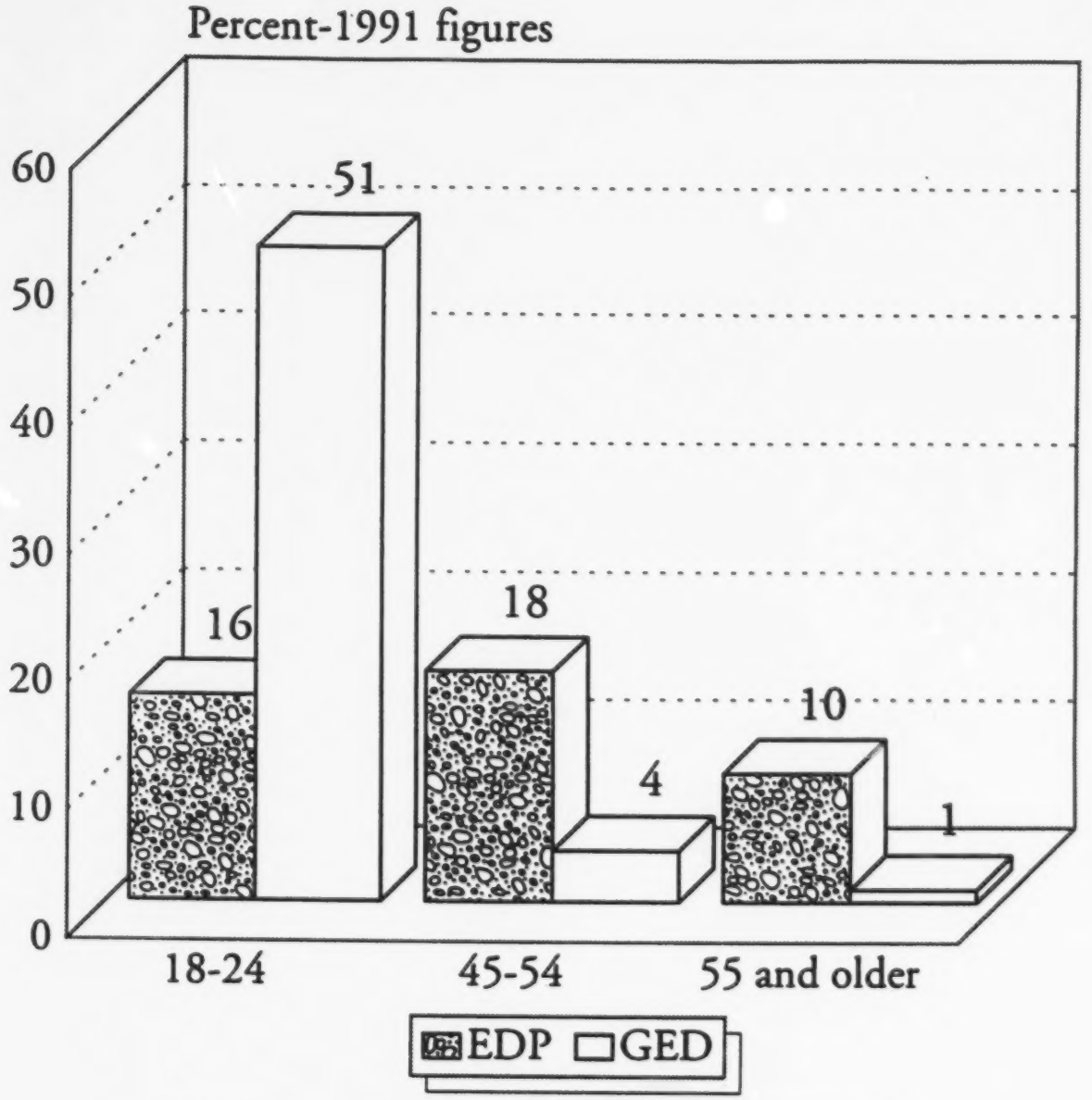
- Less than two years after completing the EDP, 40 percent of the graduates had enrolled in another educational program. Of those enrolled, 44 percent were in a community or junior college, 27 percent at a trade or technical school, and 7 percent at a four-year college. The rest were enrolled in on-the job training or other adult education or training courses. No comparable data is available for GED graduates at this time.

- EDP graduates reported that their life skill knowledge increased most in the following areas: knowing more about health, safety, and nutrition (69 percent), using community resources in education, health, and the arts (66 percent), and knowing how to continue their own education (65 percent). The highest basic and academic skill gains were in writing skills (54 percent), thinking skills (51 percent), math skills (54 percent), and research skills (48 percent).

- As with GED, tenth grade was the average high school level completed.

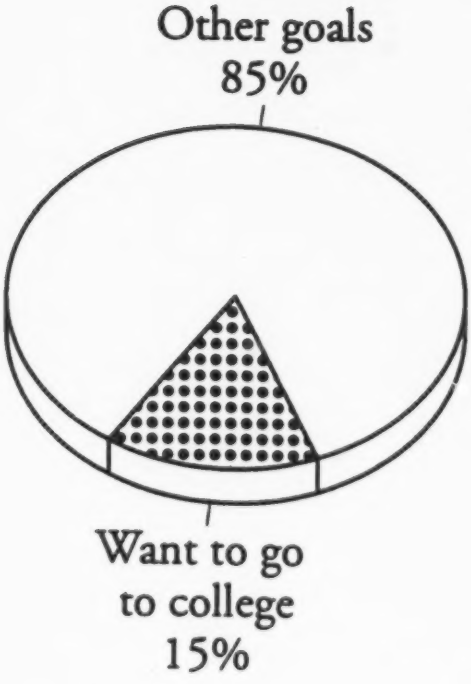
Age Comparison

EDP and GED

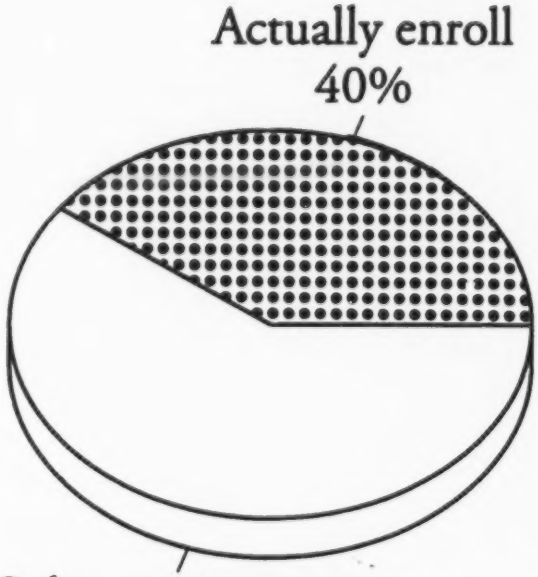


Average age for EDP graduates: 37

Goal Setting and Attainment Among EDP Participants



EDP Enrollees



EDP Graduates

Report from the "Other" High School Diploma Program

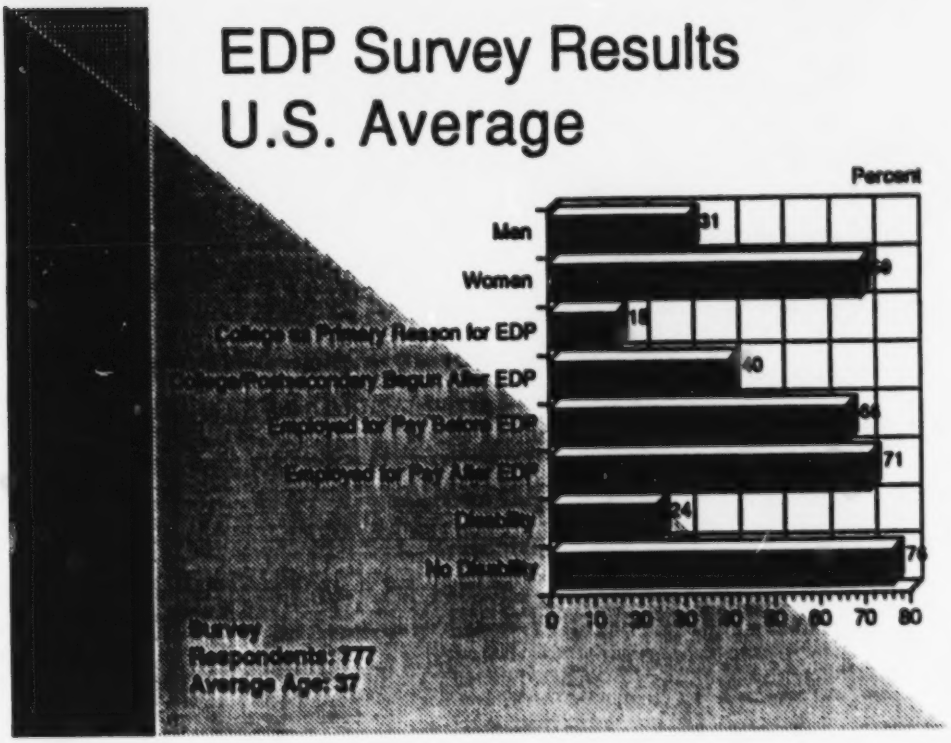
Results of the EDP Graduate Survey

The first national survey of External Diploma Program graduates was conducted in Summer 1992 under the auspices of the American Council on Education. Graduates from the seven states participating in the study—California, Connecticut, Maryland, New York, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin—completed the program in 1991.

The survey illustrates how EDP complements the Tests of General Educational Development (GED), as it serves a different population with regard to students' goals, their age, and the time they've spent out of school. Key findings of the EDP survey are summarized below.

- The average age for EDP graduates is 37. Only 16 percent of EDP graduates were in the 18-24 age range, compared to 51 percent of GED candidates. Among older adults, EDP had 18 percent of its graduates aged 45-54; GED's figure was 4 percent. Ten percent of EDP graduates were 55 and older, in contrast to GED's 1 percent.

- More than two-thirds (69 percent) of the EDP graduates surveyed were women.

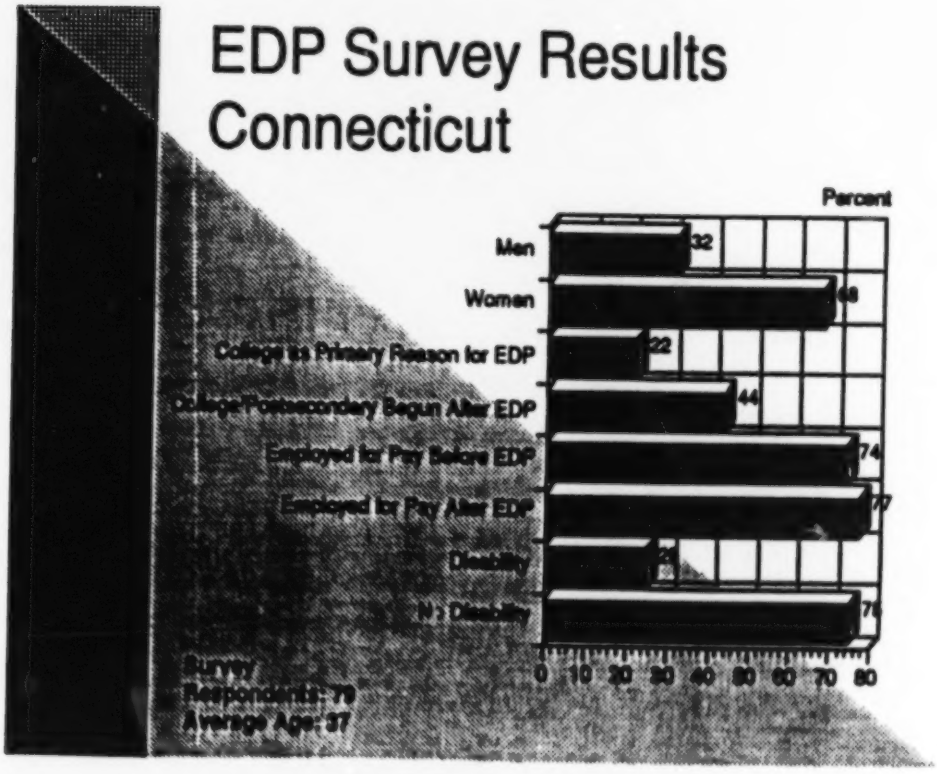


- Nearly one in four indicated some disability. Of these, 24 percent indicated an orthopedic problem, 11 percent an emotional problem or specific learning disability; 6 percent a visual disability not correctable by glasses, 8 percent a hearing disability, 3 percent a speech disability, and 26 percent some other health impairment.

- Unlike GED testers, 81 percent of EDP graduates were already in the workforce prior to taking the test, and 66 percent were employed for pay. After EDP, 86 percent

were in the workforce and 71 percent were employed for pay.

- Two-thirds of EDP graduates indicated "personal satisfaction" as the most important reason for their taking the EDP. Next in importance was "admission to college" (15 percent) and "employment" (13 percent). This contrasts sharply with the GED, where nearly 33 percent cited employment as the main reason for wanting to complete this diploma program.



- Less than two years after completing the EDP, 40 percent of the graduates had enrolled in a postsecondary educational program. Of those enrolled, 44 percent were in a community or junior college, 27 percent at a trade or technical school, and 7 percent at a four-year college. The rest were enrolled in on-the job training or other adult education or training courses.

- EDP graduates reported that their knowledge increased most in the following areas: health, safety, and nutrition (69 percent), education, health, and the arts (66 percent), and how to continue their own education (65 percent). The highest practical gains were in writing skills (54 percent), thinking skills (51 percent), math skills (54 percent), and research skills (48 percent). The lowest gains were in occupational skills (28 percent) and organizational skills (37 percent).

- As with GED, tenth grade was the average high school level completed.

For further information on this survey or the National External Diploma Program, call 202/939-9475 or write the Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials, American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle, Suite 250, Washington, DC 20036-1193; ATTN: EDP.